

## Message Text

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ACTION SMI-01

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 OES-07 SS-15 NSC-05 CIAE-00  
INR-07 NSAE-00 /046 W  
-----250531Z 032829 /20  
R 250440Z MAY 77  
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7355

S E C R E T COLOMBO 1810

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2  
TAGS: PINS, PINT, CASC, ETRA, OSCI, CE

SUBJ: GSL PRE-ELECTION NERVOUSNESS AFFECTS POTENTIAL VISITORS

REF: STATE 113679

1. SUMMARY: THE EMBASSY HAS HAD SEVERAL INDICATIONS RECENTLY OF GSL NERVOUSNESS OVER TRAVEL, ACTUAL OR POTENTIAL, OF AMERICANS TO SRI LANKA DURING THE PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN. TWO INSTANCES CITED INVOLVE SCIENTISTS UNDER SMITHSONIAN GRANTS. THERE MAY BE MORE, AND ONE OFFICIAL HAS EVEN SPECULATED THAT THERE MIGHT BE A GENERAL TRAVEL BAN IMPOSED AS FOR THE NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE LAST YEAR. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBASSY HAS BEEN RECEIVING RECENT INDICATIONS, MAINLY FROM MDFA SOURCES, OF CONSIDERABLE NERVOUSNESS ON THE PART OF THE BANDARANAIKE GOVERNMENT OVER THE PRESENCE AND POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES OF FOREIGNERS IN SRI LANKA, AT LEAST AS APPLIED TO AMERICANS, DURING PERIOD LEADING UP TO JULY 21 ELECTIONS, AND PERHAPS AS LATE AS AUGUST 26 FIRST MEETING OF THE NEW NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY. TWO RECENT EXAMPLES HAVE INVOLVED SCIENTISTS TRAVELING, OR SEEKING PROLONGED WORK STATUS, UNDER SMITHSONIAN GRANTS.

3. THE FIRST HAS BEEN THE CASE OF DR. W.J.P. DITTUS, A GER-  
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MAN NATIONAL, WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY WORKED IN SRI LANKA FROM 1968 TO 1972 DOING RESEARCH ON PRIMATES. HE AND HIS WIFE (ALSO A ZOOLOGIST AND CO-WORKER) RETURNED TO THE ISLAND IN JANUARY UNDER A NEW SMITHSONIAN GRANT TO RESUME THIS WORK AT THE REQUEST AND UNDER THE SPONSORSHIP OF THE DEPT. OF ZOOLOGY, PERADENIYA CAMPUS. IN MARCH THEY WERE TOLD THAT THEIR PERMISSION TO STAY HAD BEEN REFUSED BY THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DESPITE THE FACT THAT THEY HAD INCURRED CONSIDERABLE XPENSE AND HAD A VEHICLE AND EQUIPMENT ENROUTE. THEY WERE TO LEAVE IN A FEW DAYS. AN INFORMAL INQUIRY BY THE EMBASSY PRODUCED THE EXPLANATION BY MDFA THAT THE DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER HERSELF, AND THAT SHE WAS ADAMANT THAT THE DITTUE COUPLE BE OUT OF THE ISLAND UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTION PERIOD. IN THE PAST COUPLE OF WEEKS THE MATTER APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN DEFUSED SOMEWHAT, WHILE A FACE-SAVING COMPROMISE IS BEING SOUGHT, POSSIBLY BY HAVING THE ZOOLOGISTS ASSIGNED TO THE ZOOLOGY DEPT., AT PERADENIYA TO DO CLASSROOM OR NOTE-WRITING WORK, STAYING OUT OF THE FIELD UNTIL THE FALL. HOWEVER, THEY MAY ULTIMATELY BE REQUIRED TO DEPART AND RETURN.

4. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND WE RECEIVED REFTEL, ASKING EMBASSY CLEARANCE FOR PROFESSOR HERBERT HUBERT, A BOTANIST, TO DO RESEARCH, ALSO UNDER AN INVITATION FROM A REPUTABLE SRI LANKAN SCIENTIST COUNTERPART. WISHING TO AVOID A REPETITION OF THE DITTUE CASE, AN EMBASSY OFFICER DISCUSSED THE INQUIRY WITH MDFA, AND WAS TOLD THE SMITHSONIAN SHOULD ADVISE ALL OF ITS PERSONNEL TO POSTPONE TRAVEL UNTIL LATE AUGUST. MDFA OFFICIAL WENT ON TO SPECULATE THAT PERHAPS THERE MIGHT BE A GENERAL TRAVEL BAN IMPOSED LATER, AFTER THE FASHION OF THAT IN EFFECT PRIOR TO AND DURING THE NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE LAST YEAR.

5. THE EMBASSY IS RELUCTANT TO ISSUE A TRAVEL ADVISORY ON THIS SORT OF FLIMSY EVIDENCE OF BUREAUCRATIC IDIOSYNCRACY. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE HAVE HAD OTHER INDICATIONS THAT THIS MATTER IS A SOURCE OF GREAT CONCERN TO THE PRIME MINISTER HERSELF. IT HAS NOT BEEN POSSIBLE FOR US TO PINPOINT THE SOURCE

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OF HER APPREHENSION OR THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT IS DIRECTED PRIMARILY AT AMERICANS. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE BHUTTO ACCUSATIONS OF CIA ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF HIS OPPOSITION (COLOMBO 1756) COMING ON TOP OF REGULAR SIMILAR ALLEGATIONS FROM MRS. GANDHI IN THE PAST, HAVE MADE A DISTRESSINGLY DEP IMPRESSION UPON HER, AT A TIME WHEN SHE HAS MUCH ON HER MIND. SHE HAS HAD HER PAST TUSSLES WITH THE LOCAL LEFT, DURING WHICH SHE HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH BEING SOFT ON US/CIA ACTIVITIES, USUALLY BY OLD ADVERSARY, N.M. PERERA. IT MAY BE THAT SHE SIMPLY FEELS THAT SHE HAS ENOUGH ELECTORAL PROBLEMS WITHOUT LEAVING ANY SMALL OPENINGS FOR SUCH A CHARGE DURING THE NEXT COUPLE OF MONTHS.

6. PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT MESSAGE IS TO GIVE THE DEPARTMENT A BIT OF BACKGROUND TO THE SOMEWHAT EQUIVOCAL STATE OF OUR IMMEDIATE BILATERAL RELATIONS IN THIS PERIOD, IN CASE THERE ARE FURTHER PROBLEMS AND IRRITATIONS. EMBASSY WILL SEND A SEPARATE ROUTINE MESSAGE ASKING SMITHSONIAN TO DEFER PROFESSOR HUBER'S TRAVEL UNTIL LATE AUGUST.  
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## Message Attributes

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**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009